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GLEANINGS

LORENCE CECILIA ROBERTS



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GLEANINGS

FLORENCE CECILIA ROBERTS'S

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Across the Spirit's ripened meadows wide
With far-swung sickle and with giant stride
The great, the towering poet reapers go.

Behind, their humbler, gleaning brethren walk,
Gathering the fallen grain and chance left stalk,
For here, likewise, their Bread of Life doth grow.

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PART ONE
POEMS OF THE WAR

*Now dies our vaunted age, upgarnered in Thy
abyssmal past,
And we the immemorial lesson learn that Thou art
vast
And unescapable and strong, and that, blind shut-
tles, we
Forever weave the endless web of Thy eternity.*

FOUR AUTUMNS

(An Emotional Record)

1914

*Amazed and mute, the watching generation stands
and wonders
To what eternal shores these volumed movements
swell,
What mighty mills are turned thereby, what awful
Consciousness
Doth know that all is well.*

A PRAYER OF THE PEOPLES

Give us, O God, a great man!
A man to stand above the passion shaken times
Sceptered with Right!
Above but not aloof:
We want not desiccated learning now,
Carping of causes and effects,
And prating of a distant good.
Our hour is on us and our need is sore.
Our woes Thou knowest;
Unremittingly they rise and break
Against Thy very throne.
Our woes Thou knowest.
O Thou, who gave to hold our sword of old
A Cromwell, the Gracchi, yea, a Christ!
O Thou, who once became a pillar and a cloud to
guide,
Who dropped the saving manna in the wilderness!
Thou who hast ever succored, succor now!

1915

"PEACE!"

"Peace!" thy less wise younger children cry,
"Peace at any price!" And Peace is sweet,
But this high price which they would have thee pay
Thou canst not give.
This priceless thing for which the centuries
Have paid their mortal toll and thy own heroes
Purchased with their blood—this is not thine to give
But thine to guard.
Whenever, my Columbia, in thy high moments,
Thou hast heard that awful Voice speaking
Which assigns the fates of states, its words were
these,
"Guard thou the rights of man."
This is thy destiny, thy radiant duty,
To shirk which were to waste the piled treasure
Of the past and rob the coming ages
Of their legacy.

1916

CHOOSE WELL!

Choose well, O holder of the vote! Choose well!
The ballot has become within thy hand
A wingèd thing to carry good or ill
To far off time and many a far off land.
Choose well! Choose well!

Toward the South turn thou thy ear and hear
On plaintive winds that blow from Mexico,
The voice of a mourning multitude which pleads,
Oppressed with unalleviated woe,
 "Choose well! Choose well!"

Or yonder turn where thunderous war clouds burst
O'er massy forms in mortal struggle locked,
And catch the warning clear, while crash on crash,
The sky is shattered and the earth is rocked,
 "Choose well! Choose well!"

Or, down the vista of our future dim,
Behold the gathering strife 'gainst social wrong,
Where giant Discord strides with brandished torch
And onward leads a riotous, trampling throng.
 Choose well! Choose well!

Choose well! Nor strike from off the vessel's helm
Our master seaman's hand. The course ordained
Is storm beset, but with his guidance we shall
Reach the port unscathed and unshamed.
 Choose well!

THE MORNING OF NOVEMBER EIGHTH

Dismayed, I watched our country's mighty face
Lose calm; saw hatred working there,
And selfishness and greed and fear, until
I turned away in sick despair—

And lo! beheld the Spirit which I mourned
As being dead or worse than dead,
Stand calm as thy own mountain tops, O West,
Where she for sanctuary fled.

1917

THE TEST

If you, my land, should fail in this great test;
If you should fail and all the lustre fade
From out your flag, so future races gaze
Upon its starry folds, unstirred and curious,
As those who look upon some graven emblem
Of Imperial Rome, unmindful that
Innumerable human hearts once clung
With love about that sign; if you should fail,
And through the world the stricken whisper run
"America has been!" if you should fail,
"Twould be—how shall I say?—
As though a mighty poet died, the last
Among his peers, and his passing needs must be shorn
Of seemly tribute, since he alone of men
Had held the power to meetly sing such passing.

THE DEMOCRATIC STATE

Beneath my laws, upheld and strong,
The myriad generations throng.
Thy fathers were my care, ere thee,
So may, God grant, thy children be.
'Throughout my spacious systems spread
'The greatest deeds of the greatest dead
And the present deeds of the living great are mine.

I am the earthly part of thee
Approaching immortality.
I am thy greater self: through me
'Thy works know not futility.
Without my strong far-reaching levers
'Thy most powerful endeavors
Were but writing on the rushing floods of Time.

Mine is the ministering hand
And mine the harshly stern command.
Upon my mighty bulwarks rests
The sacred ark of man's progress,
Holding the sacred seed which grows
Where e'er the blood of martyr flows.
'Tis thine to guard, my children! It is thine!

DE PROFUNDIS

It may be that my sumacs their accustomed splendor
show ;

It may be that my barberries with gorgeous color
glow ;

I do not know.

I only know

That from a camp some miles away,

Ten thousand soldiers march to-day.

It may be in the hazy noon my half-stripped poplar
sets

The slender shadows dancing to its silver castenets ;

I do not know.

I only know

That o'er the haunted Death-dredged main

A hundred laden transports strain.

It may be that the meadows and the hillsides, as of
old,

Spread out green mantles now to catch the maples'
scattered gold ;

I do not know.

I only know

In France men die—while I breathe this breath—

An unimaginable death.

It may be parting Summer flings her largesse lav-
ishly,

Up the ravines and o'er the hills, on shrub and vine
and tree ;

I do not know.

I only know

That in the heaven overhead

A god—my God—is dead.

IN EXCELSIS

Oh, some may call these bitter years,
Their thoughts being soured, perhaps, by tears,
But I—I never hoped to know
The world aglow and shining so.
For from ten million blazing hearts
The purging flame of sorrow darts
And round the world a splendor sends,
While every doorway lintel's cleansed
With glorious sacrifice.

Our feet, which wandered for a space
With wayward dance and careless pace
Down aimless paths, no longer stray,
But walk the ancient holy way.

O ye, who go with downcast eyes!
Look up! Behold the brilliant skies!
Behold the radiant road ye tread!
Behold the shining goal ahead!
Rejoice that ye this way have found!
Be proud because ye touch this ground!
For, turn! The martyr beaten track—
See! It stretches shining back—
Straight back to Calvary!

PART TWO

POEMS PHILOSOPHICAL

*Your flesh may not express the wonder that ye are;
Your mind may not think it; the eternal fabric
Of your soul will live beyond the youngest star.
Ye have no words to indicate its goal.*

THE CHALICE

Sternly, sternly, sternly hammer out your life;
Grimly, grimly, grimly beat the rivets in;
 Shape the sides and shape the stem;
 Round the base and round the rim;
 Smooth it, trim it and emboss,
 Till it stand a finished cup.
The Thing it is to hold, O man, is God!

LINES

*(Upon Reading a Novel Written in the Analytic
Manner of the Day)*

O ye! whose vision is so supernaturally clear,
Who see through Love to Lust, who see through
 Law to Selfishness
And everywhere perceive the marks of tiger fangs
 and claws;
How strange that I, who never had this gift of clair-
 voyance,
Should yet possess the power to know one vision ye
 are blind to:
Should see refulgent o'er this night of life the shin-
 ing goal
Toward which man struggles ceaselessly.

NATURE

Vast, inscrutable, unescapable!
Our terriblest cries sink hushed in your capacious
being;
Our little lives are wrenched and flung from their
foundations the while
You imperturbably smile.

THE WARRIOR

A Chant for Dancing

From beast unto mankind
Invincible I climbed.
From caveman unto now
The ages stretch, an endless span,
Littered with foes o'ercome.
First the elements I defied,
Then I beat the ravening brutes from my side.
And I conquered heat and cold,
And I mastered gloom and night,
And the soil and the seasons
I enslaved to my might,
And Space unto my chariot wheel I chained.
Then a thousand lesser enemies I tamed,
Till Disease, itself, did yield unto my sway,
And, of all that barred my way
When I long ago began,
One foe—one only foe—remains:
'Tis myself! 'Tis Man!

REACTIONS OF A MYSTIC

To positivism

By piling tome on tome,
By prying flesh and bone,
By these and these alone,
We may not come to Thee.
But following Thine own clear ways
Which Thou like lightning scars hath blazed
Across our souls,—thus we may come.

To the Nietzschean Philosophy

Is there, then, no Love in Heaven answering mine?
Are Mercy, Pity, Justice, celestial qualities,
We thought, and all divine,
But isolated things, set solitary
Midst a world of opposites?
Man's soul, which seemed an image of its Maker,
Reflexed, if seen at all, in Nature?

Nature! Man's soul's her crown! her pride!
Poor Fear, depart! Fair Faith abide!

To pragmatism

For him the insect buzzings of the world
Drown out the music of the spheres,
Like one who, listening to a fly upon the pane,
Misses the sound of music in a distant street,
And, because the one he hears so plainly,
Inclines to think the other does not exist,—
This, methinks, 's a pragmatist.

In an hour of affliction

Once,
When my life seemed crushed as a crippled insect's
Struggling in the grass,
Or an anguished animal's, long trapped,
Which lies at last quiescent,
Having learned that movements lacerate,
I seemed to sense an awful Presence near,
To feel a gaze
Beneficent and calm,
And hear,—
 "I, too, have struggled, child,
 I know.
 From that—from that!—
 Am I God."

CROWDS

Ye Crowds!
The wonder of you!
The beauty of you! The ugliness of you!
The joy of you! The grief of you!
The humor of you! The tragedy of you!
The nobleness of you! The sordidness of you!
The hope of you! The despair of you!
You men! You boys!
You girls! You women!
You babies and children !
And all your paraphernalia of dogs and horses
And clothes and vehicles!
Shuffling and tottering and lightly stepping
And briskly stepping,—where?

Ah! There you are illumined,
And I am gripped and held with the wonder of the
thought
That in the midst of you, somehow,
God is working his will.

A FATHER MUSES

Strange, how such tender things will toughen one!
More than once this little fellow here
Has squared my jaw and set me pushing hard
Against surfaces that hurt.
Some men, I know, are braced by other things;
Mostly by pride, I think, one way or another,
Of wealth,—earned, given them, or stolen,—
Or family or attainments.
And that's not strange,
For pride's a weapon fashioned by the fight
And craftily adapted to its rules of thrust and ward,
But that one should come to lean
Upon these helpless pulling hands,—
That's strange!
And yet—I wonder—
Perhaps that old Christ legend after all—.

THE ICONOCLAST

Not by your priest-tended altars,
Not where your chants are heard,
Not where ye crowd in worship,
Not there may ye hear my word.
I speak from the halls of Karnak;
I speak from the Stonehenge rings;
I speak from the columns of Paestum;
I speak from the walls of Rheims.

Build ye your vaunting temples
To house your pitiful trust;
Pile to the sky your altars,—
Lo! passing, I hurl them to dust.
I flee from your straining vision,
From your creeds that are laid to ensnare,
And ever your Holy of Holies
Guards but the air.

Know from your flaming temples,
Know from your faiths which die,
That ye are ye forever,
And I, forever, I.

MARTHA

Gift-bearing Life!
Reluctantly on some,
On others bounteously bestowing,
For others, then, those gifts for which they clamor;
For me, my duty—flaming clear—
And strength in measure.

TO LITTLE PAUL

(Studying chemistry)

This chemistry I'd have you taught,
Ere from Life's own grim lips it's heard:
A word's more solid than a thought,
An act's more solid than a word.

PART THREE

POEMS OF PITY

*O world, this is thy greatest shame
(Unless it be ye feel it not a shame,
Which were a greater shame, indeed),
That poets still may sing and sing and sing,
And yet not sing ye into tenderness.*

THE UNFIT

"Too stiff and stubborn are these fiery souls;
Break them, O Life, to my celestial ends."
God speaks and casts them on the lap of Life.
Life takes and breaks them on her wheel
And gives them back to God. 'Then:
'Ye do your work too well, O Life.
No brawn nor sinew left here.
Cast them on the waste heap yonder."

THE IDIOT

Death, thou must be to me
All Life refused to be:
Lover and friend and babe,
And every common thing
Sweet Life to others gave
Thou to me must bring.

THE INVALID

Again my soul, from its old prison,
Hears footsteps,
Lifts its head,
And, palpitating, thinks:
"This time the steps will stop;
Chains clang down; bolts rasp back;
Key grate; door groan open;
And myself be bid forth,—free!"
Again the footsteps pass.

THE MELANCHOLIAC

When I shall have died
Weep not ye for me,
But think: "This was a soul,
Oppressed with griefs not all its own,
And sunk in unimaginable woe;
Which, more than miser longed for gold,
Or lover for his maid,
Longed to lift the latch of Life
And slip quietly into Death."

PART FOUR
MISCELLANEOUS

THE FUNCTION OF POETRY

Since thou companioned Milton's soaring mind
'Through Chaos and the dusky gates of Hell
And past the unshaken mount of God,
Not frequently hast thou maintained, nor well,
Thy most exalted function, which is, I deem,
'To serve our thoughts as seemly garb
For wear when handling mighty theme.
So clad, they dare approach full many an awful
 Presence,
Before whom cloddish Prose would prostrate fall,
And, wandering the sacred precincts o'er
Of highest Consciousness, all fearlessly traversing
Echoing court and corridor and vasty hall,
And opening many an else forbidden door,
May e'en surprise in her retreat
The Soul of Music,
Or catch the parting sound of Sorrow's feet.

WORDSWORTH

He sat his days mid mighty thoughts,
The thundering of God's wonders
Sounding in his soul.
He sat his days enthroned above the clouds,
Enshrined in light above the clouds,
And yet did know the awful gloom
Cast by those clouds below.

A MARCH NIGHT

It is a large Olympian night,—
Of dazzling moonlight, wind, and great white
clouds.

Some god has made it for a festival
And now walks hidden in the luminous sky.

O Thou! whichever of the ancient gods Thou art,
Who bade the moon to carve from this familiar
scene

A miracle of silver and of ebony;
Who caused the winds to trample through the trees,
Driving the stately clouds across the sky;
Who flooded all the heavens with light,
Cleansing them of darkness till they glow
Almost a noon-day blue,
Unstarred of all except their clearest gems,
O Thou! whichever of the ancient gods Thou art,
I hail Thee, Radiant One, and hail Thy works!

ELMS

(As seen from an automobile)

There is a country road I know,
All flickering shadows from a row
Of elm trees planted where they grow
At least a hundred years or so,—
Old padres with green gowns that blow
And arms which reach above and pray.
As speeding under them we go,
"Benediciti!" they say,
And, "Pax vobiscum!"

NOCTURNE

The night is calm;
The shadows fall from leaves
To moonlight blanchèd lawn
Unwavering.
The night is calm
And only I am turbulent.
Ah, night of peace, it cannot be
That thou and I are part of one creation.
Or, if it be, my soul would seem a fiery chip
From some far sphere still nebulous,
Dropped here by chance where vapory chaos ceased
Long ages since.

Sweet night!
As if 'twere so, subdue me!
Subdue me with thy calm!
Let thy smooth pulses yet more smoothly flow;
Let thy pale gleams shine on,
Untinctured by the lurid light I bring;
Let thy soft voices murmur still around
Until my tumult cease from very shame.

THE BALLAD OF WITCH HAGER'S
DEATH

Oh, the rain it lashed and the wind it moaned
Adown the black chimbley,
But there's na friend in th' bleak, bleak wood
To see Witch Hager dee.

Oh, the rain it lashed and the wind it roared
Adown the black chimbley,
But there's na friend, save her cats ten,
To see Witch Hager dee.

And one's as slim as the witch's hand,
And one's as black as her ee,
And one's as scraggly as her hair,
And one's more grey than she,

And one has een like the witch's fire,
And one like the witch's own,
And one purrs loud with the wind outside,
And one purrs in a moan,

And one treads soft, and one treads hard,
And one treads full ghostly,
But there's na friend in the bleak wood
To see Witch Hager dee.

"Oh come to me, Grimalkin Grey,
And I'll lift the ban from thee,
Sae there'll be one in the bleak wood
To see Witch Hager dee."

And thrice she waved her skinny hand,
And thrice she rowed her ee,
And there stood up a bonny maid
To see Witch Hager dee.

And thrice she waved her skinny hand,
Thrice her een rowed in her head,
And there stood up ten bonny maids
To see Witch Hager dead.

THE SAD MAID

"I close my een," the sad maid said,
"I close my een and wiss I waur dead.
I hear our trysty tre murmer and wave
And I wiss it waur murmuring over my grave.
My herte's like the stane that wad be at my head;
My thoughts weigh me down like a casket of lead.
I wiss I waur dead! I wiss I waur dead!"

A YOUNG WIFE TO HER HUSBAND

I sometimes tremble, love, when I remember
That this beauty which you see in me
Will one day be gone,
While that quality within thyself
Which endeared my beauty to thee,
Will still live on.

LOVE

Such various things as Love can be
To varying souls! To you 'tis
Sensual draughts drunk deep
From burning eyes and flaming flesh,
And to this other it is pride
Of mastery and possession, while to me
'Twould be just a grateful space
Where my soul might rest
In its flight through Eternity.

DEATH

Sometimes, when I am gripped close by Life and its
hot breath
Oppresses me, I think upon the spaciousness of
Death;
Its dark far-stretching vastnesses and endless echoing
shores.
Just at the thought, my dulled cramped soul expands
its wings and soars.

OLD AGE

'Tis not this body's growing old—
It is not this I fear:
The trembling step, the pulses cold,
The vision grown less clear.

It is the spirit's slow decay—
From this I fearful shrink:
To feel hope gone, mirth fled away,
And haltingly to think.

LOVE AND DEATH

If I thought death to be the end, as some folks say,
If I thought so, and you should die, then I would
pray to live alway.
For if it were the end, and you were dead, Beloved,
and I dead too,
I should have lost even the memory of you.

REPRESSION

A day and night my thoughts were filled with thee:
The sense of thee clung perfume like through all my
mind

A day and night.

And another day began

Before I knew that thou could'st never see
The glimpse of golden Paradise which was revealed
to me,

And all my little joys died within my strangling
hand.

TO A FRIEND

Weary with gazing on this life,—
A dull colored fabric unrolling beneath my eyes,
Ugly to look on, coarse to touch,—
Suddenly I find thee,—a golden broidered pattern
in the cloth!

Think not I stop at marvelling
What accident of loom had placed thee there;
Nay, friend, I cut thee out and wear thee next my
heart.

SERENA

By what untroubled waters grew your soul?
Beneath what tranquil clime's control?
What gentle spirits bred you in their ways
Of calm content and unperturbèd days?

Although you do not know or dare not tell
A secret so ineffable,
Your crystal soul, unconscious, doth declare
The angels have laid delicate fingers there.

TO A VIOLET PLANT BREAKING
THROUGH THE SOD

Tiny, triumphant Proserpine!
Exultant on the air you fling
A silent epinicion;
And to my inward ear you tell
How, for a time, you needs must dwell
Beneath the sod with all the dead,
And (joyously, joyously do you sing!)
How you yourself fought death and won,
Then from the dark and cold earth fled.
Trembling, to re-greet the sun.

Lo! little victor, I too sing
The miraculous awakening.
I hail with joy your ended strife,
And you I hail Indomitable Life!

AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT

"How wise you are!" said little Rose,
Agape before the folios
Spread out upon my desk's expanse.
I proudly smiled, nor told her that
The volumes she was gazing at
Mere props were to my ignorance.

A tome from my omniscient friend
Britannica (edition ten),
A *Newcomer*, a *Writer's Guide*,
A Woolley's *Handbook*, by its side
A corpulent lexography,—
I name these, reader, as I should,—
As any honest author would
An aidful bibliography.

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